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ABSTRACT

This study compares the effectiveness of audio-taped feedback (ATF) with traditional written feedback (WF). Its focus is on the ATF and WF provided to 23 college sophomore English majors at a Taiwan university. Students were also asked at the end of the academic year to evaluate and compare both ATF and WF from their perspective. It is concluded that both the combined and ATF methods were much more efficient than the WF-only method in terms of the quantity of feedback. In addition, the students viewed ATF more favorably than WF. Findings from this study argue strongly for the use of ATF over WF. It is preferred by students and is more efficient in terms of the teachers' time. When using ATF, the teacher seemed to discuss writing problems more thoroughly and provided more detail than when using WF. (Contains 20 references.) (KPT)

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A Quantitative Analysis of Audiotaped and Written Feedback Produced for Students' Writing and Students' Perceptions of the Two Feedback Methods

Abstract

Some university EFL composition teachers in Taiwan have experimented with audiotaping their commentary on students' writing to help students revise. However, there has been very little research on how effective this method is for Chinese students. Therefore, a study was designed to shed light on this issue by comparing audiotaped feedback (ATF) with traditional written feedback (WF). In this study, the researcher focused on the ATF and WF provided by herself for the 23 English major students in her sophomore composition class (a two-semester course) at Tunghai University. The feedback that the researcher had provided for the fifth and sixth writing assignments was later collected back from students for analysis. The feedback for the former was provided by using WF only, while the feedback for the latter was provided by using a combined method, i.e., both ATF and WF. The time spent on the feedback for each essay had been noted when the feedback was originally written/recorded. At the end of the academic year, the students were also asked to fill out a questionnaire to report their perceptions of the two types of feedback. The research questions were: (1) How effective is the combined method and the ATF method as compared with the WF-only method in

terms of the quantity of feedback? (2) What are students' opinions about and attitudes toward ATF and WF as feedback methods? To support the findings from this study, many examples of these two types of feedback were contrasted to show their differences.

The results showed that both the combined and ATF methods were much more efficient than the WF-only method in terms of the quantity of feedback. In addition, the students viewed ATF more positively than WF and also preferred the former. Findings from this study argue strongly for the use of ATF over WF.

Keywords: Writing instruction, second language writing instruction, teacher feedback.

Introduction

What is the best way to respond to students' writing? Many composition teachers and researchers have been asking this question for a long time. Since teachers often spend a tremendous amount of time reading and responding to students' writing, information about the most effective method of providing feedback is valuable. Some EFL teachers in Taiwan have experimented with audiotaping their comments for students' writing and achieved positive results. However, there has been very little empirical research on the commentary provided in this way. In order to shed light on the effectiveness of audiotaped feedback (hereafter referred to as ATF), there is a need to compare it with traditional written feedback (hereafter referred to as WF). A study was designed in which the teacher alternated two methods of responding, one using a combined method (hereafter referred to as CM), i.e., ATF and WF, and the other using WF only (hereafter

referred to as WFO). By comparing the feedback produced through these two methods and students' perceptions of both methods, the researcher wished to examine the differences between ATF and WF.

The research questions of this study are as follows:

1. How effective is CM as well as ATF as compared with WFO in terms of the quantity of feedback?
2. What are students' opinions about and attitudes toward ATF and WF as ways to provide feedback?

Review of the Literature

ATF has been used since the early 1960s. Unfortunately, little empirical research has been conducted about it. The existing literature deals mainly with an L1 context and much of it provides testimonies made by instructors who used this feedback to explain how they used it and why (Hunt, 1975; Hunt, 1989; Hyland, 1990; Klammer, 1973; Moxley, 1989). Only a few studies were based on empirical data.

A few researchers have investigated the effectiveness of ATF in improving students' writing performance. Pearce and Ackley's four-year study (1995), which involved 470 subjects enrolled in business writing classes, reported an experiment involving a combination of ATF and WF. It was found that such a method led to improvement in students' motivation, the quality of feedback, and a 7.9% increase in students' grades, when compared to the grades they received when the teacher used WF. Hurst (1975) also showed that ATF improved students' report writing and that students receiving ATF achieved better grades than those receiving WF. Logan et al. (1976) found that the quality of students' written responses to dental exams improved when ATF was given, and that students receiving ATF performed better than those receiving WF. Kirschner, van den Brink, and Meester (1991) studied students in a distance learning program at a

university in the Netherlands and they also reported that the quality of students' writing significantly increased after ATF was adopted.

Other researchers have looked at the difference in the amount of speech produced by ATF and WF. Pearce and Ackley (1995) found that the method of combining ATF and WF allowed the teachers to produce approximately twice as much feedback as the WF-only method. ATF was also faster. On average, it took 2.6 minutes to tape and 3.1 minutes to write comments per page after having read a paper one time. Clark (1981) used ATF when grading business and technical reports written by college undergraduates. He also found that ATF offered the advantage of speed. In addition, Kirschner, van den Brink, and Meester (1991) reported that the amount of feedback produced on tape was significantly greater than that produced on paper--1.7 times greater--while the amount of time spent on the former was similar to that spent on the latter: 53 minutes per student with ATF and 49 with WF. Cryer and Kaikumba (1987) interviewed givers and receivers of ATF by asking them to compare this method with WF. Givers reported that the former saved time not only in recording comments but also in advising students to revise later (since students would understand the comments better and therefore would not ask many questions)

Regarding the quality of ATF, Kirschner, van den Brink, and Meester (1991) claimed that students in a distance learning program who received ATF felt that ATF was complete and clear, while those receiving WF felt that WF was only "adequate." According to Cryer and Kaikumba (1987), givers of ATF felt that ATF provided richer feedback because the giver's intonation can be varied (thus criticism could be softened and encouragement could be made to sound sincere). Receivers of ATF felt that ATF provided better quality and comments which were less cryptic than WF. Berner et al. (1996) reported that all the teachers and most of the students considered ATF as having many advantages over the

traditional WF. For example, ATF provided a higher level of detail, specificity, and spontaneity, and it also made students more aware of the audience. According to Pearce and Ackley (1995), students reported that they would choose ATF over WF because they believed that the former would allow them to understand the teacher better. Logan et al. (1976) claimed that students found ATF to be more informative, complete, and understandable. Carson and McTasney's (1978) undergraduate students said that ATF was more complete and intelligible. Clark (1981) found that ATF had the advantage of inflection and that he was better able to explain major structural problems on tape than in writing for college undergraduates learning to write business and technical reports. ATF also allowed him to make more detailed suggestions about how to improve the content of a report and to correct misspellings and explain rules about style, grammar, and punctuation. Yarbro and Angevine (1982) showed that 87% of the university students in freshman composition classes felt that ATF was more effective than WF. Also 90% of them felt that they better understood the teacher's taped comments. Sommers (1989) also showed that ATF was more detailed, allowing instructors to clarify their ideas more effectively.

Some studies examined how students relate to ATF on the affective level. According to Carson and McTasney (1978), Kirschner, van den Brink, and Meester (1991), and Logan et al. (1976), students found ATF to be more personal than WF. Yarbro and Angevine (1982) also reported that students felt they received more personal attention from the instructor and became more aware of how much time was spent evaluating each paper by using ATF. Clark's (1981) students in business and technical classes and Moore's (1997a, 1997b) college undergraduates in report writing classes liked ATF more than WF. According to Kirschner, van den Brink, and Meester (1991), students receiving ATF on their essays responded more

positively than those receiving WF. They felt ATF was more enjoyable. Cryer and Kaikumba's study (1987) reported that receivers of ATF felt more motivated to work on their writing because they could hear the teacher's voice on the tape. They also felt a higher motivation to begin revising right after receiving ATF because the feedback was more extended and the advice was more detailed. Yarbro and Angevine (1982) showed that 73% of the students felt more motivated to revise with ATF. In general, the students felt that listening to tapes was more enjoyable than reading WF. In addition, the two instructors involved in this study said that the students responded well to ATF and showed an increased interest in the class. The students also claimed that ATF gave a sense of security because it could be replayed as many times as necessary and it also provided a sense of relationship with the instructor. Coleman (1972) also found that 9th-graders in English classes who received ATF regarded composition writing more favorably than did students who received WF.

Another advantage has also been reported. Sommers (1989) claimed that ATF provided instructors with a means of conducting individualized instruction and by using such a method the instructors were able to serve as role models for students to emulate in peer response sessions.

However, these same studies also reported findings which were less positive about ATF. Kirschner, van den Brink, and Meester (1991) and Yarbro and Angevine (1982) found that there was no difference in the writing performance of students who received ATF and those who received WF. Kirschner, van den Brink, and Meester (1991) showed that the amount of time spent in supplying these two types of feedback differed minimally (ATF=53 minutes per student, WF=49 minutes), with the main difference lying in the amount of time spent in preparation. According to Yarbro and Angevine (1982), instructors actually felt that it took more time to provide ATF. In addition, Clark (1981) found that it took time to

learn to tape comments effectively. He felt that the benefit of ATF was not as great as some researchers have claimed because it was still necessary for the teacher to mark stylistic, grammatical, and spelling mistakes by hand on the written reports. Cryer and Kaikumba (1987) reported another disadvantage: givers of ATF felt that the lack of a written record for later reference was a drawback and that it might also be difficult for students to skip part of the commentary and listen to the parts they would like to hear.

In the L2 context, so far, there has been little research on ATF. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, only one study conducted by the researcher herself has dealt with ATF, a case study on one of her students. The findings showed that both the combined method and ATF method were much more effective than the WF-only method in terms of the quantity of feedback, and that the ATF method encouraged the teacher to discuss writing problems more thoroughly. However, since this study was based on only one student, it is difficult to generalize the findings to a larger population. Therefore, still little is presently known about how effective ATF is for L2 learners. Therefore, there is a need to research this topic.

Methods

This study was part of a larger study conducted by the researcher during the 1999 academic year which examined the effectiveness of using ATF to help her EFL university students revise.

Participants

The teacher in this study, also the researcher, has had four years of experience in teaching university-level EFL writing. She started using ATF at Tunghai University in the 1996 academic year and has been using it ever since. The students in this study were the 23 sophomores in her

composition class in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature at Tunghai University in Taiwan. These students already received six years of general language skills training in secondary schools, and they had also taken a composition course designed for freshmen before they entered the researcher's class.

Instructional procedures

The students were required to write four essays in the first semester, and three in the second. The types of writing undertaken were mostly expositions. The researcher adopted the process approach to teaching writing and often asked students to collaborate with one another during the prewriting and revising stages, by having them conduct small-group or whole-class prewriting discussions and small-group peer response sessions. She also provided feedback on students' writing in the form of WF, ATF, and occasional individual conferences. In order to study the effectiveness of the ATF method, she alternated her response methods by using ATF in essays 3, 4, and 6 and WF in essays 1, 2, 5, and 7. However, even though she mainly used ATF when responding to the former set of essays, she also used WF to a certain extent for writing problems which could be more easily dealt with by using such a method. Most of these writing problems concerned language errors. In other words, she sometimes added, deleted, or substituted a few words on paper to address these language problems. Therefore, it can be said that when responding to essays 3, 4, and 6, the researcher actually used a combined method. When responding to the other essays, the researcher used WF only.

The following procedures were followed for the combined method:

1. The researcher had a cassette tape for each student. She recorded her comments on the tapes and gave them to students to listen to at home. After the students finished listening to the tapes, they returned them to the researcher.

2. Before the researcher began to record comments for a particular student, she read the essay from beginning to end once to gain an idea of the overall content and structure of the essay. This was done so as not to misunderstand the student's purpose or plan for writing. This step was important because a wrong comment would require a lot of work to rewind the tape to the correct spot and then record a revised comment. As the researcher read the essay, she marked the sections she wanted to comment on by numbering them consecutively. Then she started to record comments on the tape. On the tape, whenever she commented on a writing issue, she mentioned the corresponding number in order to help the student locate it on the paper.

3. Although ATF was the main format for responding, the researcher still used some WF. This was used to address problems concerning language correctness (e.g., style, grammar, vocabulary, word usage, spelling, and punctuation) . In terms of quantity, these corrections consisted of a relatively small portion of the total feedback provided.

4. As a general principle for responding to writing, the researcher always included positive comments among her comments on students' writing, in order to encourage students to make a good effort in writing. In addition, she avoided focusing too much on micro-level issues, e.g., word usage, vocabulary, grammar, or punctuation. She believes that when responding to first drafts, the instructor should pay a great deal of attention to macro-level issues concerning content (e.g., development of ideas, originality of ideas, soundness of argument) , overall structure of the essay, organization of ideas within each paragraph, paragraphing, tone, style, etc. She always encourages her students to save most of the micro-level editing work for the final draft. She believes that a focus on language errors in early drafts should be avoided because it would direct students' attention to language and therefore cause them to neglect macro-level problems.

5. A handheld cassette recorder was used to record comments since it was light and the researcher could hold it very close to her mouth; in this way her voice could easily cover up background noises. The recorder' portability also allowed her to walk around when necessary.

Data Collection Procedures

Only the feedback the researcher provided for the 5th assignment, a cause-and-effect essay, and the 6th writing assignment, an argumentation essay, were analyzed in this study. The feedback for essay 5 was provided by using the WFO method while the feedback for essay 6 was provided by using the CM method. The ATF was transcribed and analyzed together with the WF. The researcher kept a record of the amount of time she spent on the initial reading of each essay. When the CM method was used, this initial reading activity included reading the essay once, numbering the writing issues she wanted to address on tape, and writing some comments (mostly language corrections) on paper. When the WFO method was used, this activity included an initial reading of the draft, and then the researcher proceeded to write her comments on paper. The researcher also recorded how much time she spent on the recording of her comments on tape (when using ATF) and on paper (when using WFO).

Analysis of the data was conducted under the assumption that the researcher's proficiency levels as exhibited in her ATF and WF were equivalent and therefore not a confounding variable. A native speaker who has a Ph.D. in an area related to language teaching was asked to examine the two types of feedback provided for the students and he believed that the researcher was equally proficient in her ATF and WF and that the students should be able to understand both very well.

Results and Discussion

The results and discussion are presented in the following section

according to the order of the research questions:

Quantity of Feedback Produced through ATF and WF

Table 1 shows the amount of time taken to provide feedback through the CM and WFO methods, as well as the quantity of feedback produced through each method.

Table 1: Average Amounts of Time Required to Provide Feedback through CM and WFO Methods and Quantity of Feedback Produced

	Essay 5 (WFO)	Essay 6 (CM)
Initial reading+marking paper+WF (average)	NA	18.8 minutes
Initial reading (average)	5.8 minutes	NA
Recording comments on tape (average)	NA	19.6 minutes
Recording comments on paper (average)	25.9 minutes	NA
Total time required per paper (average)	31.7 minutes	38.4 minutes
Total feedback produced for 23 essays	4,757 words	54,258 words (ATF=53,706, WF=552)
Average amount of feedback per paper	206.8 words	2,359.0 words
Average amount of feedback per minute per paper	6.5 words	61.4 words

The CM method apparently was more efficient than WFO, since the former produced an average of 61.4 words per minute for each paper and the latter produced only 6.5, indicating that ATF produced 9.4 times more feedback per minute. Apparently, as far as quantity is concerned, the CM method was a more efficient way of responding to writing. (Here "efficiency" is defined as the quantity of feedback produced in a period of time. Quantity of feedback is an important consideration since many students fail to understand what their teachers say because their teachers did not give

extended explanations of writing problems.) This finding supported Pearce and Ackley's (1995) study, which found that the CM method allowed the teachers to produce approximately twice as much feedback as the WFO method. In Pearce and Ackley's study, on average it took 2.6 minutes to tape and 3.1 minutes to write comments per page after having read a paper one time. In comparison, the researcher's ATF was even more efficient than what Pearce and Ackley showed.

An additional analysis was made by singling out the ATF provided in the CM context. It was found that the teacher produced an average of 2,335 words per essay in 38.4 minutes, which means 60.8 words per minute (total of ATF for 23 essays=53,706 words). On the other hand, through WFO, the teacher produced only 24 words for an essay in 31.4 minutes, which means 6.5 words per minute. This means that the actual production of ATF was 9.2 times faster than that of WF. When both the time for the initial reading and preparation and the time for making comments are considered together, ATF was obviously much more effective than WF in terms of quantity. This finding confirmed results from studies by Clark (1981), Cryer and Kaikumba (1987), and Kirschner, van den Brink, and Meester (1991). Kirschner, van den Brink, and Meester (1991) reported that the amount of feedback produced on tape was 1.7 times greater than that produced on paper, even though the time spent did not differ much: 53 minutes per student with ATF versus 49 minutes per student with WF.

Examples of Feedback Produced through the ATF and WF Methods

In the larger study, of which the present study is a part, in order to examine the quality of the feedback produced through ATF and WF, the feedback was quantified according to the number of writing problems addressed. A writing problem is defined as an element in a piece of writing which has a negative impact on the quality of the writing. It can be any problem with the content, structure, organization, coherence, logic, clarity, style, tone, word usage, grammar, spelling, or

punctuation. For example, a writing problem can center around a macro-level issue, such as the appropriateness of a writing topic or the overall structure or organization of an essay, or it can involve a micro-level issue such as the misuse of a word or a grammar point. To determine whether the researcher's ATF and WF were different qualitatively, the writing problems addressed were divided into the following six categories:

1. Responses to content. These address ideas expressed in the writing and usually evaluate the validity, development, and focus of these ideas.

2. Responses to structure and organization. These discuss structure (e.g., what the basic elements of an essay should be, the appropriate lengths of these elements, what an introduction consists of) and organization (e.g., where certain ideas should be placed).

3. Responses to logic and coherence. These address whether the ideas expressed are logical or consistent with other segments of the text.

4. Responses to clarity. These deal with whether the ideas expressed are understandable.

5. Responses to style and tone. These concern the adoption of certain rhetorical devices (e.g., anecdotes) or manners of expression (e.g., tone, voice, linguistic manipulation) to achieve certain effects.

6. Responses to errors in linguistic form. These concern grammar, word usage, vocabulary, spelling, or punctuation. Quite often they are in the form of corrections.

The researcher performed a substantial discourse analysis (which involved a complex coding system) of ATF and WF based on the categorization system mentioned above. However, in the following, due to a limit on the length of this paper, the researcher will not present her detailed analysis. Instead, she will present only two examples of each of the above six kinds of comments to show the qualitative differences

between ATF and WF:

1. Responses to content

Alice's 6th essay (argumentation) was about whether ability grouping in school is a good practice. On a content issue, the teacher made a long CM comment which consisted of 122 words. The teacher not only explained why Alice should discuss how students who failed in the schools became social security problems, but she also made a suggestion about what Alice could write in her revision. This comment is as follows:

> And No. 20. "They will influence social security directly or indirectly." Now, can you tell me HOW? It seems that this is a major idea in your writing- I mean in this paragraph. So you should tell the reader HOW these students who have been given up would influence social security. Maybe you could try saying something like "They may break school rules in order to get attention and to have fun in their lives, since they cannot have fun in their classes. So, they may steal things, they may rob people, and in this way they get into a lot of discipline problems, and this may cause some social security problems." OK? Yeah, explain a little bit more here. All right.

The following is a WF comment the researcher wrote on Alice's 5th essay (cause and effect), which was about why some modern people don't want children. In this comment, the teacher encouraged Alice to elaborate on one of the causes that lead people to not want children. This comment contained only 11 words, and it did not point out a direction for Alice to follow in revising:

> Can you elaborate on this, since this is a cause-and-effect paper?

The ATF comment presented above was obviously much more elaborate than the WF one. It is likely that Alice might find the former more useful in helping her understand her problem and also revise. The two examples given above are quite typical of the comments the teacher made

in the ATF and WF contexts. The teacher seemed to give more detailed comments on the students' content in the former context.

2. Responses to structure and organization

Kate wrote her 6th essay arguing that betel nuts should be banned in Taiwan. One of the paragraphs discussed the negative consequences of betel nut chewing: corruption of our social mores and the soiling of the environment. The teacher recorded a comment about a structural problem: Kate had two major ideas in a paragraph.

> There's a problem with this paragraph. OK. You are talking about two things. Number 1, you are talking about these sexy women selling betel nuts. OK. You are saying that this is a bad thing, a bad element in our culture. And then the second half of the paragraph, you are saying betel nut juice makes many public places really dirty. OK. Now, this is unrelated to the 檳榔 [betel nut] culture, OK? Therefore, I am thinking maybe you could separate this paragraph into two paragraphs, you know, with each one focusing on one of the two things you discuss.

The following is a WF comment on Helen's 5th essay on why students cut classes. Helen had a problem very similar to the one mentioned above, i.e., she included more than one main idea in a single paragraph. In this paragraph, she mentioned three causes of why some students skipped classes:

> How many causes do you want to discuss here? Sickness, family occasions, your own activities? It would be better if you focus on one factor in each paragraph.

In this WF comment, the teacher mentioned that there were three separate causes. However, the comment was quite brief, nor did it explain why sickness, family occasions, and a person's activities should be considered as three separate causes. Since it is very time-

consuming to write comments down, it is not surprising that in the WF context, the teacher responded by making comments which were a lot shorter than those in the ATF context.

3. Responses to logic and coherence

In Alexander's 6th essay, he argued against parents' practice of making their children take a lot of lessons outside of school. In his conclusion, he mentioned one of his major arguments but failed to refer back to the others. The teacher reminded him about this coherence problem:

> And then No. 24. OK. You tried to summarize one of your arguments. You said in your third sentence, this line, you said, "After all, winning in the beginning doesn't mean winning in the whole life." OK. You mentioned one reason. And then, the next sentence, you said, "based on these reasons." I- What are the other reasons? You did not mention them in your conclusion. So, I can see that there is some kind of inconsistency in what you said in these two sentences. OK.

The following is a comment of a very similar nature. In the conclusion of Alice's 5th essay about what causes modern people to give up having children, Alice made the mistake of introducing a new idea, the consequence of not having children, which she did not mention in the body of the paper. Yet, this comment is much shorter than the previous ATF comment:

> Your conclusion does not seem to connect with your main ideas. In the body of your paper, you did not talk about the consequence of not having children!

The above two examples were not unique cases. There were many other comments which showed that in general ATF comments were more detailed than WF ones.

4. Responses to clarity

In her 6th essay, Sherry argued that prostitution should be legalized. In one of her sentences, she used the pronoun "they" without making it clear about what this pronoun referred to. The teacher recorded a comment that explained in detail what "they" could possibly refer to in this context and why it was confusing to the reader:

> You said, "They are under the control." Now, who does "they" refer to? Because in the sentence you have "customers," which is a plural form. You have "illegal prostitutes." This is a plural form. So, I don't know what "they" refers to. "They" could refer to "customers," and "they" could refer to "illegal prostitutes" also. OK. So, this is very confusing here.

In her 5th essay about why students cut classes, Helen had a very similar problem. The teacher wrote that there was confusion about what "they" referred to, but the teacher did not point out all the words that "they" could refer to. Therefore, it might be hard for Helen to figure out why a problem existed. The comment is as follows:

> What does "they" refer to?

Since there was a difference in the degree of thoroughness exhibited in the above two comments, it is very possible that the ATF comment above can lead the students to a better understanding of their problems.

5. Responses to style and tone

In Cherry's 6th essay, she argued that elementary and secondary schools should require their students to wear uniforms as a security measure. The teacher recorded a comment about the repetitiousness in how Cherry tried to make her point:

> No. 7. You said "enhance and pay attention to school's security." "加强和注意." Well, actually these two are the same thing. If you enhance security, that means you pay

attention to security. So, you don't need to say the same thing twice. OK.

In her 5th essay, Mary talked about what caused her to be overweight. She mentioned that having a boyfriend would encourage a girl to lose weight. Like Cherry, Mary also made a mistake by stating the same idea twice. The relevant portion of the text is given:

"*I agree with that as well.* Having a boyfriend always could change a girl's both appearance and attitude. Being involving in love, a girl would try her best to get rid of her shortcomings, including losing weight. *I also have this point of view.*"

Repetitious!

In the ATF comment, the researcher explained to Cherry clearly why her writing was repetitious, but in the WF comment, the researcher only wrote "Repetitious, " to indicate to Mary that there was a problem. These two examples were among the many comments which showed that ATF was more thorough.

6. Responses to errors in linguistic form

The teacher recorded a comment about a wording problem on Alice's 6th essay about ability grouping. In this comment, the teacher told Alice why she should have used the word "similar" rather than "nearly" by explaining the difference between these two words:

And then No. 3. When you say "reach a nearly level"- I don't know what you mean. You mean "相似的水平"? "Nearly-" "Nearly" is an adverb. So, you cannot use it as an adjective. Here, I think you need an adjective- like "Their academic performances are at a very similar level," or something like that.

The following are several examples of the teacher's responses to the language errors in Alice's 5th essay. With the exception of the

first error (concerning "angles"), the teacher simply crossed out the mistakes and wrote corrections without explaining the nature of the mistakes. (In the following excerpt, the teacher's comments and corrections are italicized and bolded.)

We often say that children are angles who are ~~assigned~~ by God. Children play vital
spelling *sent* a
role in a family indeed; they bring happiness and hope to the family. However, today in many young couple's minds, children mean a big trouble. They don't want them. That is because modern couples are not willing to spend their time ~~taking care of them and~~ money
or
~~for all expenses.~~
on their children

The examples above show that the teacher often both explained language errors and provided suggestions for revision when she used a taperecorder. In contrast, when using WF, she had a strong tendency to correct language mistakes without telling the students what was wrong. This is understandable because it is very time-consuming to write down explanations for errors in grammar, wording, mechanics, etc..

In summary, the examples shown above suggest that the ATF context seemed to have induced the teacher to give more explanations for writing problems and make more suggestions for revision than the WF context. This finding corroborated those of Clark (1981) and Sommers (1989). According to Clark, ATF allowed him to explain major structural problems more, to make fuller suggestions on content, and to explain in more detail rules about style, grammar, and punctuation.

Students' Opinions about and attitudes toward ATF and WF

At the end of the course, the students were asked to fill out a

questionnaire in Chinese to indicate their feelings about ATF and WF. The students' responses are discussed in the following. When the responses on the questionnaire are presented, they are bracketed ([ ]) to show that they are the researcher's translations.

Effectiveness of the teacher's comments

The students were asked three questions regarding the effectiveness of the teacher's ATF and WF comments, as follows:

1. I think audio-taped feedback is better than written feedback in terms of the validity of comments.

2. 1. I think audio-taped feedback is better than written feedback in terms of the clarity of comments.

3. 1. I think audio-taped feedback is better than written feedback in terms of the thoroughness of comments.

The students' responses are presented in Table 2, as follows:

Table 2: Students' Feelings about Effectiveness of ATF and WF

	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure or no comments	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Statement 1	21.7%	60.9%	17.4%	0%	0%
Statement 2	52.2%	39.1%	8.7%	0%	0%
Statement 3	56.5%	34.8%	8.7%	0%	0%

If the "strongly agree" and "agree" categories are combined, it can be seen that the students' responses to ATF were very positive, with 82.6%, 91.3%, and 91.3% of the students either strongly agreeing or agreeing that ATF was superior to WF in terms of the validity, clarity, and thoroughness of comments, respectively. Therefore, it can be concluded that the students considered ATF as a much more effective way of responding to students' writing.

Amount of time needed to read or listen to the teacher's comments

The students were asked: Did it take more time to read the

teacher's comments or listen to the teacher's comments? Nineteen out of the 23 students (83%) said that ATF took longer, while four (17.4%) said the opposite. Some students also indicated on the questionnaire the reasons why they thought so. Two main reasons were mentioned. Three students said that ATF took longer because they had to rewind the tape and listen to it many times. One student said it was because he had to take notes while listening. As to the reason why some students thought WF took longer, only one reason was mentioned: the teacher's handwriting was hard to read and therefore WF took longer. In summary, the majority of the students believed that it took more time to listen to comments than to read comments.

Amount of time required to revise according to ATF and WF

The students were asked: Which method caused you to spend more time on revision? Eighteen of the 23 students (78%) reported that ATF caused them to spend more time revising. As to the reason, two students mentioned that this type of feedback pointed out more problems than WF, and therefore they spent more time solving these problems. Another student reported that she felt obligated to take her revision seriously because ATF made her sense that the teacher was working very hard to facilitate her revision. However, one student (4%) said the opposite: WF caused her to take more time. Two other students (9%) claimed that the format of the feedback did not make any difference. One student (4%) indicated that she had no idea which format led her to spend more time on revising. Overall, most of the students believed that they spent more time revising if they received ATF. One student (4%) claimed that it was the type of writing problem that determined the amount of time spent on revision, and that the format of the feedback was not a factor. Elaine was the student who made this comment, and this is what she said:

[It depends on the types of writing problems I have. Some problems, such as those related to grammar and word usage, are easier to solve, and therefore less time is taken. Other problems require large-scale revision, such as problems related to the overall structure and organization of the essay, and they will take more time.]

Quality of revisions made according to ATF or WF

Regarding the quality of revisions, the students were asked: Which method helped you to revise more effectively? Sixteen out of the 23 students (70%) said that ATF produced better revision. One major reason was raised by three students: ATF allowed the teacher to make commentary which was more valid and comprehensible than WF and therefore led to better revisions. Two of these three students said that since ATF led them to spend more time revising, the quality of their revisions was certainly better. Another student indicated that ATF led him to look at his content holistically, which he believed was helpful for his revision. However, two students (9%) said that WF produced better results. Two other students (9%) reported that both types of feedback should be used because both had their merits. One of these two students said that she liked ATF because it allowed her to reach a better understanding of her problems, but she also liked WF because it allowed her more autonomy in revising. The researcher speculated that this student probably felt so because the teacher usually said less in WF comments and therefore the student felt less pressure to do what the teacher suggested. However, three students (13%) claimed that the format of feedback did not make any difference.

Students' preference for ATF or WF

The students were asked: Which method did you prefer? Nineteen of the 23 students (83%) said they preferred ATF. Vicky explained why she preferred ATF: "[The teacher explains problems clearly, and I am able to

take notes of the nature of my problems by using a method I am familiar with. And so it is very easy for me to solve my writing problems.] " However, three students (13%) said that they preferred WF. John was one of them, and he said, "[I preferred reading comments, because, first, there was no need to fuss with a taperecorder, and, second, the teacher can easily draw lines on the paper to connect words or segments of my writing that should be contrasted with each other or examined together. That is, the student will be able to know which parts should be revised.] " On the other hand, one student (4%), Jane, said she liked both. Jane indicated, "[I think we should have both types of feedback. The teacher can deal with simple errors, such as those related to grammar, by writing down the corrections. The teacher can save ATF for explaining problems in the structure and organization of an essay, which are more complicated." In general, the majority of the students preferred ATF. This result supported the finding of Clark (1981) and Moore (1997a, 1997b).

Students' perceptions of their relationship with the teacher in the ATF and WF contexts

The students were asked this question: Did the method of feedback make you feel differently about your teacher? Since this is an open-ended question, not all the students talked about their feelings about both ATF and WF. Twenty-one students revealed their feelings about ATF, and their responses are presented as follows:

1. The teacher seemed more approachable in the ATF context.

Sixteen out of the 23 students in the class (70%) reported that the teacher appeared more approachable on the tape. Six of these 16 said that they felt as if they were talking to the teacher in person. For example, Francis said, "[I think ATF made me feel closer to the teacher. It is like the teacher was there discussing my writing problems with me.] " One of the students even said that ATF was a

very humane way of interacting with students. This finding is very similar to the findings of Carson and McTasney (1978), Kirschner, van den Brink, and Meester (1991), Logan et al. (1976), and Yarbro and Angevine (1982). For example, Yarbro and Angevine's students felt that ATF allowed them to obtain more personal attention from their instructor.

2. ATF made students feel the teacher's caring attitude toward their writing.

Two out of the 23 students (9%) indicated that ATF made them feel that the teacher cared about their writing and that the teacher was not picky about what they wrote.

3. ATF made student-teacher interaction more informal, lively, and interesting.

Three out of the 23 students (13%) mentioned that ATF made their interaction with the teacher more informal, lively, and therefore more interesting. This finding confirmed Kirschner, van den Brink, and Meester (1991), whose students said that ATF was more enjoyable.

Regarding how the students felt about their interaction with the teacher in the WF context, only three out of the 23 students (13%) reported their feelings. These three students said that in the WF context the interaction was more formal and serious, and thus less lively. In fact, one student said that the atmosphere was stiff and that there was no real interaction between the teacher and the students. Only one student, Dorothy, reported that she did not sense any difference between the two contexts.

In summary, all the comments the students made about their relationship with the teacher in the ATF context were positive, while almost all the comments the students made about the WF context were negative. Therefore, the students seemed to feel more positively about the way their teacher interacted with them in the former context.

Advantages and disadvantages of ATF

The students were asked: Besides what you said above, what else can you say about the advantages and disadvantages of ATF and WF? The following advantages were mentioned about ATF:

1. ATF is more helpful than WF in helping students understand writing problems.

Twenty-two of the 23 students (96%) mentioned that ATF was more useful in helping students understand their writing problems than WF. Five of these 22 students said that the teacher tended to give more comments and also comments of a more detailed nature when using ATF. For example, Charles said that through ATF he had a better sense of how the teacher felt about his paper: (At the end of the comment, Charles even praised the teacher for the great work she did.)

> [When I listen to the tape, I can tell how happy or unhappy the teacher is with my essay. A cold tone means that she thinks I wrote a lousy paper and that I should rewrite it. An angry tone means that my essay is horrible and that I did not pay attention to what she said in class. An encouraging tone means that overall the essay is fine and that I just need minor revisions.] Wonderful--> You did a great job!

Findings similar to what is mentioned above have been reported by Berner et al. (1996), Carson and McTasney (1978), Clark (1981), Cryer and Kaikumba (1987), Kirschner, van den Brink, and Meester (1991), Logan et al. (1976), Pearce and Ackley (1995), Sommers (1989), and Yarbro and Angevine (1982).

2. ATF comments can be listened to many times.

Two students (9%) mentioned the advantage of being able to listen to the comments many times. This result supported the finding of Yarboro and Angevine (1982), who claimed that their students felt a sense of security because they were able to play the tapes as many

times as necessary.

3. ATF motivated students to understand their writing problems and revise.

Two students (9%) reported that ATF motivated them to understand the nature of their problems more than WF and that ATF also led them to revise more. This finding supported studies by Cryer and Kaikumba (1987), Pearce and Ackley (1995), and Yarbro and Angevine (1982), who found that ATF improved L1 students' motivation to write and revise.

4. ATF allowed students to listen to comments and revise simultaneously.

One student (4%) said she appreciated being able to listen and revise at the same time.

5. ATF forced students to listen to comments attentively.

One student (4%) said that ATF forced her to pay close attention to what the teacher was saying because if she missed something, she would have to rewind the tape, which was troublesome.

6. Students could develop listening skills by listening to the teacher's comments.

One student (4%) mentioned that she benefited from ATF because it helped her develop listening skills.

However, some students also mentioned the disadvantages of ATF:

1. There were technical problems with using ATF.

Eleven out of the 23 students (48%) mentioned technical problems. Five of these 11 students mentioned background noises as well as the low volume of the teacher's voice when the batteries used for recording were low. Four students mentioned that it was troublesome to have to rewind the tape if they missed some of the comments. One student complained about not being able to find on the tape the beginning of the commentary for the essay he wanted to work on. (For the purpose of doing research, the teacher put all the feedback she provided for essays 3, 4, 6 on the same tape according to the order of the essays, and therefore it would take the student some time to find the segment

for a particular piece of writing.) Two students simply said that it was troublesome to have to use a tapeplayer to listen to the teacher's comments.

2. Occasionally the teacher failed to discuss writing problems clearly enough for students.

Two of the 23 students (9%) mentioned that sometimes the teacher did not discuss writing problems thoroughly enough, even though ATF comments were in general more detailed than WF ones.

3. The students might forget what the teacher said because she explained things too clearly.

Two of the 23 students (9%) said that the students might not remember very well what the teacher said, ironically, because she explained things almost too clearly on the tape and thus the students did not have to think, which prevented the commentary from registering in their heads.

4. Sometimes students were unable to understand words the teacher used.

One student (4%) mentioned that she occasionally failed to understand some of the words used by the teacher.

Advantages and disadvantages of WF

Even though overall the students felt more positive about ATF than about WF, some students did report some advantages of the latter, as follows:

1. There was no need to use a tapeplayer.

This was mentioned by three of the 23 students (13%). They felt that it was more convenient to see the comments on paper.

2. Written comments were clear.

Three students (13%) reported that they found it easy to understand the teacher's written comments. However, one of these three students said that this was true only if the problems involved were language errors.

3. WF made students more aware of their writing problems than ATF.

Two students (9%) mentioned that since WF provided less information for the students to understand their writing problems and to figure out ways to revise, the students were forced to do their own thinking, and thus came to a better understanding of the nature of their writing problems and their writing processes. For example, Alice said,

> Reading comments: I can think about my problems again and again, and therefore I have a deeper impression of the problems I have.
>
> Listening to comments: Since the teacher's ATF comments are more detailed, the mistakes I made do not register in my head.

However, some disadvantages were mentioned by the students too:

1. WF was less thorough and therefore less useful in helping students understand writing problems than ATF.

Fourteen students (61%) reported that written comments tended to be less thorough in the discussion of writing problems, and therefore were less helpful. One student said that written comments were sometimes too general to be helpful. Another student, Mary, complained that sometimes written comments failed to offer explanations of the nature of writing problems. She reported, "[Sometimes when my writing is not clear, the teacher only put down one word, 'meaning,' to indicate her confusion about what I mean. In such a case, I can not figure out where the problem is and how I can revise.]" Three students indicated that they sometimes misunderstood the comments. For example, Elaine said, "[A written comment can only point out the fact that there is a problem somewhere, but it does not explain the nature of the problem very clearly or provide a suggestion for revision. Therefore, sometimes I do not understand what the teacher wants.]" Three other students (13%) said that they sometimes failed to clarify their

misunderstandings with the teacher, either because they did not bother to ask questions or because they did not have the opportunities to do so.

2. Students might have difficulty in reading the teacher's handwriting.

Two of the 23 students (9%) said they sometimes had problems reading the teacher's handwriting, and for some reason they also failed to ask the teacher for help.

3. Some students might lack the motivation to read the teacher's written comments.

Interestingly, one student (4%) said that he was sometimes too lazy to read the teacher's written comments, but that this never happened with ATF, because all he needed to do was to listen passively and no efforts were needed.

The above findings showed that ATF was perceived by the students as a more desirable way of responding to writing. The students not only believed that ATF has higher quality than WF, but they also said that they spent more time absorbing the teacher's ATF comments and making revisions in response. On the affective level, the students also liked ATF better and felt closer to the teacher when such a method was used. The advantages and disadvantages of ATF and WF reported by the students also suggested that the former method was a more effective way of communicating with the students. Such findings are consistent with past research about L1 learners' opinions about and attitudes towards ATF. It seems that there is no great difference between L1 and L2 students' perceptions of ATF and WF as feedback methods.

Conclusions and Implications

It is hoped that findings from this study will help EFL researchers and teachers understand ATF and WF and to identify areas worthy of further investigation.

Conclusions

The following conclusions can be drawn from this study: 1. The CM method obviously was much more efficient than the WFO method. For each paper, an average of 61.4 words were produced per minute through CM, while only 6.5 words were produced through WFO. That is, the former produced 9.4 times more feedback per minute.

When ATF was singled out and compared with WF, the former was also more efficient in terms of the quantity of feedback. The actual production of ATF was 60.8 words per minute per essay while that of WF was only 6.5. In other words, it required 9.2 times more time to put WF down on paper than to record ATF on tape after the essay had been read once. ATF was more efficient than WF when the quantity of feedback is considered.

2. The responses from the questionnaire show that the students believed that ATF produced feedback of a higher quality than WF. According to the students, it took them more time to process ATF, but the quality of their revisions was better. Overall, the students preferred ATF and also believed that their relationship with the teacher was better in the ATF context than in the WF one. In addition, according to the students, the overwhelming advantage of ATF was that it provided feedback of a higher quality than WF, while the major disadvantage was technical problems which interfered with the students' comprehension of the teacher's feedback: background noises on the tapes and the low volume of the teacher's voice (due to low batteries) . However, the advantages still outweighed the disadvantages, since the majority of the students overall preferred ATF to WF. On the other hand, the major advantage of WF was that the students could access the teacher's comments at any time in any place without a tapeplayer, but the major disadvantage was

that the quality of WF was lower than that of ATF. Overall, the students still viewed ATF more positively than WF.

Even though a complete discourse analysis is not presented here, the examples of ATF and WF given in this paper should give a glimpse of the quality of the teacher's comments. When using ATF, the teacher seemed to discuss writing problems more thoroughly than when using WF, in terms of the level of detail in which the teacher explained the nature of writing problems and suggested revision. This statement could apply to comments of any kind, i.e., comments concerning content, structure, organization, coherence, logic, clarity, style, tone, word usage, grammar, spelling, or punctuation.

Implications

A few implications for teaching can be drawn from this study. This study showed that, in terms of the quantity of feedback, the CM method was superior to the traditional WFO method as a way to respond to EFL student writing. ATF was also superior to WF in terms of the quantity of feedback. Therefore, EFL teachers are encouraged to use this method to save time. However, these teachers should make sure that no technical problems interfere with students' retrieval of information on tapes. That is, background noises must be kept low and the volume of the sound has to be high enough for easy listening. Since one student in this study complained about difficulty in finding the beginning of the commentary for the piece of writing he wanted to work on, teachers could record comments at the beginning of a tape for every assignment (which means teachers will erase their comments for the previous essay each time they record).

This study has its limitations. In the assessment of any teaching method, students' feelings and opinions about it are important.

Therefore, in this paper in the investigation of the effectiveness of ATF and WF, the researcher looked into students' perceptions of these two methods. However, the researcher is aware that students' responses can be considered as only one of the indicators of the effectiveness of the two methods. Other indicators should be explored also, such as the quality of the revisions made by the students in response to feedback. However, since there is a limit on the length of this paper, the students' revision performances will be discussed in another paper. In addition, since only the feedback provided for two writing assignments was examined, the generalizability of the findings was compromised to a certain extent. Also, since the types of writing assignments may also play a role in the nature of a teacher's feedback, future researchers could include a larger variety of writing assignments (e.g., definition, comparison and contrast, process) . In addition, since the teacher was also the researcher, her attitudes toward the two types of feedback might have had an effect on the way she produced feedback. That is, she might have preferred ATF and made more efforts in producing quality feedback when using ATF. Therefore, readers of this paper should keep this in mind. Furthermore, in order to obtain a clearer picture of the effectiveness of audiotaped teacher feedback, the revisions made by EFL students in response to ATF should be examined to see if students are able to revise successfully with the help of this kind of feedback. (The researcher is presently analyzing revisions made by the students in this study in response to ATF, and the results will be presented in another paper.) Researchers may also examine what types of ATF feedback lead to effective revisions more often than others (e.g., feedback on various aspects of writing, such as content, organization, logic, grammar, word usage, etc.) . Findings from studies on these issues should be valuable to EFL composition researchers and teachers.

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